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G911f William Gropper: retrospective, by
August L. Freundlich. Los Angeles,
Ward Ritchie Press, 1968.
128p. illus. 7.50

Bibliography.

COPY 1
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I. Freundlich, August L. II. Title.

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William Gropper: Retrospective

William Gropper: Retrospective

by August L. Freundlich

Director, Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery, University of Miami

The Ward Ritchie Press: Los Angeles
in conjunction with the
Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery
of the University of Miami
1968

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 68-18437
Designed by Joseph Simon
Lithographed in the United States of America
by Anderson, Ritchie & Simon : Los Angeles

Acknowledgment

It is difficult for me to say how long I have been aware of William Gropper's work or where it first impressed me. As an American concerned with art, I have known it as a part of my training and career. For this reason it is extremely hard to credit all those whose insights and knowledge have helped to shape this book. Particular thanks, however, should go to Mr. Gropper's dealers: both the ACA Gallery, and the AAA Gallery of New York City, the Don Conacher Gallery of San Francisco, and the Heritage Gallery of Los Angeles, which were so generous in helping to locate collectors, and in giving access to their files and photos. My thanks are also most warmly extended to the many lenders to the exhibit. They have been willing to disarrange their homes so that others might share their treasures. Many have also generously contributed photos for use in the book.

Finally acknowledgment must be made of the invaluable assistance of Rafael Rivera-Garcia, Mark West, and Barbara Read, as well as the staff of the University of Miami Library, whose assistance in research contributed so much to the completion of this book.

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Table of Contents

William Gropper, a Critique . . . 11
William Gropper: His Statements . . . 27
Chronology . . . 31
Bibliography . . . 33

List of Illustrations

COLOR

A. Weber and Fields . . . 50
B. Monotype . . . 59
C. Strike . . . 62
D. Refugees . . . 71
E. Good and Evil . . . 81
F. Faceted Glass Windows . . . 84
G. Art Auction . . . 94
H. The Senate . . . 112

BLACK AND WHITE

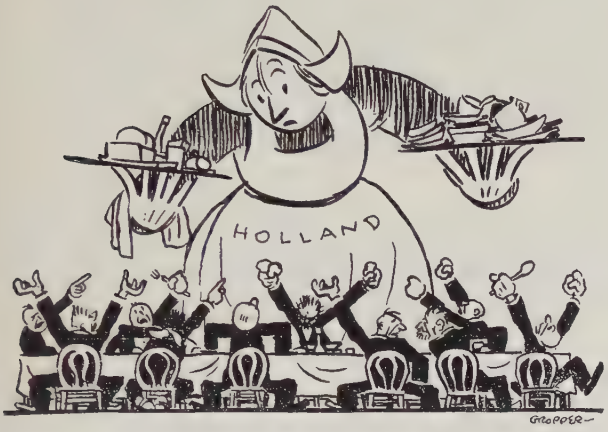
1. Peace Problems of Holland . . . 11
2. New Year's Eve . . . 12
3. Prices . . . 13
4. Two Peasants . . . 36
5. Harvest of War . . . 14
6. Sowers of Senatorial Winds . . . (A) 15
7. Sowers of Senatorial Winds . . . (B) 16
8. Drawings of the U.S.S.R. . . . 37
9. The Idler . . . 38
10. Sketches for Mural . . . 38
11. Next War . . . 17
12. Schenley Mural . . . 39
13. Hirohito . . . 18
14. Mural for Post Office . . . 40
15. Combat . . . 41
16. Spanish Prisoners . . . 41
17. Kuniyoshi Portrait . . . 42
18. The Hostages . . . 43
19. Combat . . . 43
20. Out of Darkness . . . 44
21. Interior Department Mural . . . 44
22. Pretzel Vendor . . . 45
23. Art Patrons . . . 46
24. For the Record . . . 46
25. Cigar Maker . . . 47
26. Firing Squad . . . 48
27. Dedicated to the Editor of *Freiheit* . . . 47
28. Meeting . . . 49
29. Tailor . . . 51
30. Museum Opening . . . 52
31. Sentencing . . . 53
32. L'Etat C'est Moi . . . 54
33. The Artist's Apprentice . . . 55
34. Sketch for Detroit Mural . . . 56
35. Hysteria . . . 56
36. War . . . 57
37. Cotton Pickers . . . 58
38. The Invaders . . . 60
39. Air Raid . . . 61
40. Pearl Harbor . . . 63
41. Opposition . . . 64
42. Storm Troopers . . . 65
43. Farm Hand . . . 66
44. Death to the Aggressors . . . 67
45. De Profundis . . . 68
46. Mask Dance . . . 69
47. The Master and the Pupil . . . 70
48. Boy with a Book . . . 72
49. Art Show Opening . . . 72
50. Time . . . 73
51. Rip Van Winkle . . . 74
52. Headless Horseman . . . 75
53. Johnny Appleseed . . . 76
54. Paul Bunyan . . . 77
55. Committee Chairman . . . 78
56. Diogenes . . . 79
57. Joe Magarac . . . 80
58. Horseman . . . 82
59. Reconstruction (Warsaw) . . . 83

60. Polish Wedding . . . 85
61. The Ice Man . . . 19
62. Emancipator . . . 86
63. The Village . . . 87
64. Untouchables . . . 88
65. Sweatshop . . . 89
66. Joshua . . . 90
67. Villagers . . . 91
68. Piece Work . . . 92
69. Point of Order . . . 93
70. Witch Hunt . . . 95
71. Tycoon . . . 96
72. Little Florist . . . 97
73. The Committee Chairman . . . 98
74. Bill of Particulars . . . 99
75. Gourmet . . . 100
76. Art Auction . . . 101
77. Farm Worker . . . 102
78. Self Portrait . . . 103
79. Jurists . . . 101
80. Musicians . . . 104
81. Chess Players . . . 105
82. Night Spot . . . 106
83. Young Girl on Chair . . . 107
84. Memoir . . . 108
85. Little Tailor . . . 109
86. Calligraphic Drawing . . . 110
87. Profile . . . 112
88. Senior and Junior . . . 113
89. Grandfather . . . 114
90. Decree . . . 115
91. Wine Drinker . . . 116
92. Wedding . . . 117
93. The Dictator . . . 118
94. The Cat . . . 119
95. Fisherman . . . 120
96. Rembrandt Lady . . . 121
97. Catastrophe . . . 122
98. Fantasy . . . 123
99. Baker . . . 124
100. Dedication . . . 125
101. Relationship . . . 126
102. Dialog . . . 127
103. Take-off in Music . . . 128
104. The Hunt . . . 128

William Gropper: Retrospective

William Gropper, a Critique

AUGUST L. FREUNDLICH



1. Peace Problems of Holland. Cartoon. *New York Tribune*. 1919

They say that an artist cannot escape his time. William Gropper in his time, his art and his life reflects a goodly segment of American twentieth century experience. It begins with immigrant grandparents in the teeming tenements of New York, advances through the liberal causes of so many working people in the depression years, and in the latter part of his life shows an amazing success and comfortable affluence.

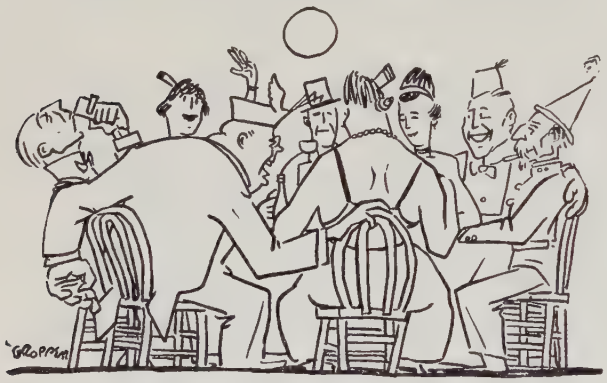
Gropper's home and studio have been for some years now on a hilltop in Westchester County outside New York City. He drives a late model, luxurious convertible. As a successful and greatly respected artist he is called to many parts of the world and jets to his appointments like any business or professional man. Within recent months, he has been in California for the Tamarind Lithography Workshop and a one-man exhibit in Los Angeles; a Chicago suburb (where he has some stained glass windows working); in Florida for a working vacation; and in and out of New York City to see his dealers and many collectors. In between, of course, he finds time to paint and draw and think about future projects in his home-studio. The studio is in a rustic fieldstone house, complete with swimming pool and a view across the valleys of the Catskill mountains.

The similarity between Gropper, his house and the typically successful suburbanite stops about here, on the outside. Much of the house was built by non-professional labor—the artist and his capable and devoted wife, Sophie. A large percentage of the structure is devoted to the studio, to Gropper pictures on almost every conceivable inch of wall, and to the storage of his work. The Gropper of 1967 also doesn't look the part of the suburbanite. His face is weathered, not the sea-captain or corn-farmer kind of weathered, but a face which has seen much of life, and yet is a face handsome enough to be suitable right now for a T.V. or movie acting career. There are, however, the eyes, sharp, penetrating blue eyes; eyes which are never still, always studying, appraising, looking for form and shadow. Those eyes are impossible to ignore; they dominate the scene.

Those eyes first looked out at the world on December 3, 1897. What they saw could hardly have been promising. Grandfather Gropper had been a pioneering immigrant-settler of New York's lower East Side. This, however, cast no special status on the Gropper family; they were as poverty-stricken as all the rest. Both mother and father worked for pitifully small wages in the sweatshops, with their impossibly long hours and tiny wages. Home was in a house on Pitt Street in the Williamsburg Bridge area. Father was a scholarly man with many interests and a knowledge of eight languages, but, somehow, he was never able to hold a job—much less make any advances in the work-a-day world. It was Mother Gropper who held the family together. She was a seamstress with a regular job, who also took piece-work home with her at night. Gropper's first working experience was carrying bundles of cloth home from the lofts for his mother to sew on at night. At fourteen Bill Gropper left PS 171 and began working twelve hours a day, six days a week, for $5.00, and nothing more for overtime. With such a beginning in the proletarian world, it is no wonder that Gropper has a keen social consciousness, that he feels for the

down-trodden, the victims of injustice. His best-known subject matter is biting caricature of America's wealthy and powerful, of politicians, moguls of business and industry; yet, many of these same types proudly number a Gropper work among their private collections.

In addition to the usual critics' kudos, he has been called the "workingman's protector," "the American Daumier," one of the "greatest anti-Fascist artists," "vitriolic leftist" and "an artist's artist." His work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum and many others, great and small. Gropper's career has already spanned a half century—a half century of tremendous social improvement for America's working man, half a century of continual wars and inhuman oppression, and for many of Gropper's fellow graduates of the East Side, increasing prosperity, acceptance, and creature comforts.



2. New Year's Eve. Cartoon. *New York Tribune*. 1919

An artist's work does not spring fully mature and whole into the world like an Athena from the brow of Zeus. Rather, it is a life-time accumulation and development, involving much practice and many false starts. It is a continuous evaluation, first by the artist, then by critics and, more than anything, by time—time as a continuum, as a perspective, causing comparison with the work of others. After almost fifty years, at this writing there is some reason to believe that the development of Gropper's art can be described. It is, however, never easy to describe, much less evaluate, the work of a single artist. Such tasks tend to run to artificial categories or slots to which work is assigned arbitrarily. Unfortunately (perhaps fortunately would be more apt a word) human lives and human works do not fit into neat pigeonholes.

How, then, can one understand the tremendous body of work by an artist such as Gropper, who began as a political cartoonist and illustrator for periodicals, painted numerous murals, and in easel paintings tackled such diverse subjects as: politicians, peasants, American folklore, war, and Jewish village life?

An artist's work stems from such sources as the art education received, the period in which it was made, the artist's concerns, interests and abilities. These can be presented in fairly short order. The main ingredient, however, follows: inexplicable and indescribable. It is the frustration of all those who prefer their answers in the back of the book that the mystique of art which comes through to the individual only by exposure and reaction through time is its chief strength.

Somewhere during those earliest days while carrying bolts of cloth, Gropper started to draw —at home on scraps of paper, on sidewalks and on walls when he could dawdle on an errand. Somehow he managed to get through elementary school, without any scholastic distinction except one—a medal for drawing.

Once when he was still in school, a casual passer-by saw his drawing on the cement of the tenement. He was invited to attend a life-drawing class at the Ferrer School, where he received his first formal art training. For three years he was a student at this school, attending sessions conducted by Robert Henri and George Bellows. Among his fellow students were Ben Benn, Bob Minor, Man Ray, Peggy Bacon, John Barber, Elias Goldberg and O. E. Caesar. The young artists-to-be criticized each other's work freely in the laissez-faire atmosphere set up by Bellows and Henri.

Much of Gropper's artistic philosophy can be understood when looked at in terms of the classes run by Henri and Bellows. Gropper recalls the school as being a very informal place where students and teachers freely discussed art and

life. It was here that he first developed his belief in the personal nature of art. Henri and Bellows operated on the basis of an open exchange of ideas; they often gave opposing criticisms of a student's work, and agreed on only one major point. They insisted that each artist must be himself; a human being, living and working in the real world. "Right then," Gropper says, "I began to realize that you don't paint with color—you paint with conviction, freedom, love, and heartaches—with what you have. The other end is the technique, the equipment with which you convey that."[1]

The school is described by another famous pupil, the late Stuart Davis, as, "radical and revolutionary in its methods. All the usual art school routine was repudiated. Individuality of expression was the keynote and Henri's broad point of view in his criticisms was very effective in evoking it. Art was not a matter of rules and techniques, or the search for an ideal beauty—it was the expression of ideas and emotions about the life of the time."[2]

Somehow he managed to complete a year in high school despite the early death of his parents. In 1916 he won a scholarship to the National Academy of Design, but remained as a student for only a short time. The Academy was a systematic and rigid institution where students were allowed no expression or individuality. Young Gropper would not let himself be poured into a mold like the plaster casts from which all worked. After he had drawn the same toe innumerable times, he began to draw further up on the plaster statue, even to look into the life class. Such rebellion could not be tolerated, and soon Gropper was looking for a job.

He became a clerk and general helper in a men's wear shop, among whose customers were such artists as George Luks, Arthur Davies, T. E. Powers and F. Opper. Sometimes Bill was elevator or door man, sometimes he lettered signs or addressed post cards to customers which he often decorated with little drawings of scenes and personalities in the store. One of these reminder-cum caricatures caught the eye of Frank A. Parsons, president of the New York School of Fine and Applied Art and a renowned figure in the American art world.

3. Prices. Cartoon. *New York Tribune*. 1919

Gropper was offered a part-time scholarship, if he could get off work for the necessary hours. He made up for the loss in pay by winning every available cash prize. And he continued to do some of those funny drawings that had pleased the clothing store customers. Eventually they came to the desk of *New York Tribune* Assistant Editor Garrett, and Bill was hired to make small drawings and cartoons for the Sunday Magazine. This was 1920 and the pay of a cartoonist was a bit higher than a store clerk, $40.00 weekly.

The young man learned his trade well and printer's ink has been a part of his life ever since. His cartoons at the *Tribune* were well received even though they did not yet bring him broad recognition. One day he and a *Tribune* reporter were sent to do a story on the International Workers of the World, the radical workers' association known as the Wobblies. Here was a group of the poorest working men which so distrusted the power structure that it wanted to change the social order and put control into the hands of those who did the work. What had begun as a reportorial assignment ended as an introduction to a whole new world for both young men. They stayed to help, and became active participants. From here Gropper was introduced to many other liberal causes, all of which soon looked to him for posters, drawings and illustrations. He helped in publishing a small paper, *The Rebel Worker*, similar to today's underground press.

[1]Lansdell, Sarah. "A Maverick . . . in Words and in Paint: William Gropper," *Courier-Journal Magazine*, November 7, 1965.

[2]Sweeney, James. *Stuart Davis*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1945.

One of Gropper's fond memories of the early *Tribune* days is a statement of Heywood Broun. The young cartoonist noticed that all the old-time newspaper men turned first to their copy and then to the obituary notices when the paper came out. When asked to explain why, Broun said, "It sums you up." To Gropper, ever since, it has been a dictum that all of a man's life is to be summed up in two-column inches, so that he must do nothing that he would be ashamed of.

In 1922, at the age of twenty-five, Bill Gropper and his *Tribune* friend took a boat for Cuba. For a brief period they worked for a newspaper there, then for an oil company, then, having lost what little money they had in a bank crash, worked their way back to New York. Now Gropper traveled west, finding jobs, food and lodging as they were needed. For the first time the New York tenement-boy saw the agricultural heart of the continent, the gigantic stone bulges of the western mountains. When he returned to the East he found himself living on the Bowery, washing dishes in a Second Avenue slop joint, but drawing, always drawing.

5. Harvest of War. Cartoon. *The Jewish Tribune*. Oct. 7, 1927

Increasingly, Bill Gropper's things were published by: *The Dial*, *Village Quill*, *Pagan* and others. Beginning in 1924, he began to do a daily cartoon for *Freiheit*, a liberal Yiddish newspaper. *The New Masses* and *The Sunday Worker* published a cartoon weekly, and many other monthly magazines were happy to accept work. During the latter twenties and early thirties, Gropper's work was published among others by: *Pearson's*, *New York Post*, *Shadowland*, *Photoplay*, *Bookman*, *Spur*, *New Yorker*. For a period of several years Robert Benchley's column in the *New York American* carried Gropper's illustrations. *Smart Set* magazine, which was edited by H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan and widely read, asked Gropper to do a series of cartoons of churches and congregations for which he spent weeks at church services, drawing clergy and congregation. The article which Mencken published in support of his battle with the clergy caused quite a scandal. The best-remembered cartoons, however, were published in 1935 by *Vanity Fair*, a sophisticated magazine presided over by Frank Crowninshield and Claire Booth. In a series of tongue-in-cheek cartoons of unlikely historical situations was one showing Emperor Hirohito of Japan pulling a cannon—Nobel Peace Prize. Also favored were Senator Huey Long entering a monastery, William Randolph Hearst appointed ambassador to Soviet Russia, and J. P. Morgan becoming a soap-box orator. The resulting hubbub caused the American State Department to issue a disclaimer, and, when the Japanese began to apply commercial pressure to advertisers, brought about the demise of *Vanity Fair*. It is not surprising that Gropper was soon as well known in the drawing rooms of Newport and Bar Harbor as in the meeting halls of lower Manhattan.

Along with recognition for his cartoons, Bill Gropper's personal life also took a turn for the happier. In 1924, Sophie Frankel, a bacteriologist, became Mrs. William Gropper. For a honeymoon the two used a tin lizzie to tour the West, painting signs and doing odd jobs to support themselves.

During 1927, Bill and Sophie went to Russia—he was a delegate to the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, along with Theodore

Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis and Scott Nearing. The Groppers remained as guests of the government for a month and spent eleven more traveling throughout the country, drawing for many Russian periodicals; subsequently, some of these drawings were published in book form in this country. Their oldest son, Gene, was born in Paris shortly after their Russian travels came to and end. A friend and fellow cartoonist published a drawing showing Bill and Sophie wheeling their baby; its caption: "Made in Russia."

In 1930 Bill and Sophie started their carpentry and allied building chores on their new home in the wilds of Westchester County.

By the late twenties, Bill Gropper, third generation American and graduate of New York's lower East Side, had become an established illustrator and newspaper cartoonist, a draughtsman of skill and great social conscience, an artist widely published in periodicals of the left, right, and various shades of opinion between. He had become a sentinel of the oppressed and a champion for liberty and peace. Some time during 1921 the draughtsman also began to paint seriously, but privately, on themes similar to those in his publications.

The earliest paintings were very much under the influence of masterworks which Gropper studied on museum visits. These began during his earliest days as a cartoonist. The artist, as well as numerous writers, have commented on his frequent relationship to Oriental art, particularly Hokusai and Chinese painting. The Oriental tradition was seen in many early decorative panels, the treatment of "Southern Landscape" (1945) strongly suggests delicate Sung forms re-interpreted by a western hand, as does much of his early production.

Gropper's studies of the masters have continued over the years and included Rembrandt, El Greco, Flemish painters—particularly Breughel, Bosch and Gruenewald, and more recent masters such as Daumier, Goya, Géricault, and Cézanne. Goya is certainly not too far in the background of Gropper's "Execution"; Géricault comes to mind when "Death to Aggression" is seen. There is pure romanticism in "Rearing Horses" —they are beautifully planned and executed— the sword-wielding combatants fierce as any 19th century Arabian. Romanticism is also apparent in the Spanish Civil War series and many of the works dealing with American folklore.

Gropper's paintings of folklore and American landscapes have often been contrasted with that of the regionalists whose subject matter was often similar. Their basic purpose and style orientation were, however, markedly different from Gropper's.

For the most part, its artists had come from rural and Midwestern backgrounds, and studied the Cubist, Surrealistic and Non-objective styles of the generation after Cézanne in Paris.

After their return home, they revolted against their teachers, as many young artists had done before them. The resultant style was a complete revocation of all things European and a return to the spiritual homeland of agrarian America. Such painters as Benton, Curry, and Wood, the trio best known for its American hymn-singing, achieved recognition with pictures of farmland, farmhands, mountains and folklore.

6. Sowers of Senatorial Winds. Cartoon. *Vanity Fair*, May, 1930 (A)

Gropper, on the other hand, came from a big-city background, with all the sophistication that implied, studied entirely under American teachers, and was much more closely connected to American problems. His approach to European art was through the Old Masters. When Gropper approached the American myth as subject, it

was without the narrowly conceived aversion to European style, current or old.

Some works, particularly "Paul Bunyan" (1944), "Johnny Appleseed" (1945), "Paul Revere" (1945), "The Headless Horseman" (1945), "Rip Van Winkle" (1945) and "Joe Magarac" (1946) are Regionalist in their nature. Others, such as "Picking Cotton" (1942), "Southern Landscape" (1945), "Klan of the South" (1945), and "Hitchhiking in Arizona," have a close affinity to the Regionalist school; but, instead of the wholesome naturalistic pride of country typical of such works, they display a rather biting and incisive criticism of events often lacking in the more famous members of the school. Although, in the painting of the thirties he often treated similar subject matter, the critics have not accepted it as a part of the defined Regionalist style.

7. Sowers of Senatorial Winds. Cartoon. *Vanity Fair*, May, 1930 (B)

The last major stylistic influence on Gropper was Cubism—a force which has permeated almost all of his 20th century painting. Although he at no time practiced the poetic break-up of the picture planes so common to Cubism, Gropper frequently introduces a series of angular shapes into his compositions. These are not usually a major theme, but serve as a means to conduct the viewer's eye. On occasion, as in the "Wine Drinker" (1964), he takes a kind of liberty with surfaces first attempted by Cézanne and developed further by Braque, Picasso and their colleagues. In this particular picture, the Drinker sits next to a table, the surface of which is tilted so as to be almost parallel with the picture surface. The transparent bottles remain vertical, as though pasted on.

In other oils, such as "Memoirs" (1960) or "Quartet" (1960) or even the earlier "Judge Signing a Writ" (1964?), there is considerable inter-penetration of planes and ambivalence between foreground and back. For the most part, however, when it is used, the angles and planes of Cubism are for Gropper's work a mere compositional device which helps to focus attention where it is wanted.

Although he had become well established as a political satirist through his published drawings, Gropper was unknown as a painter until his first gallery exhibit in 1936. His work was an almost instant success, receiving critical acclaim and professional recognition. Such an acknowledgment of merit was rare in a period when the validity of native American art was not yet acknowledged. It was a period in which representational styles dominated, most 'modernistic' movements having been rejected outright. The Mexican muralists and their American counterparts were a great influence as walls in public buildings became available through various government-sponsored projects.

During 1934, Gropper did a mural for Schenley Distilleries which was, however, not shown for three years. The panels celebrated various aspects of the vintner's art. Included in the composition were caricatures of Grover Whalen, chairman of the board, and Harold Jacobi, president of the corporation, which were later erased. This commission was the first of a series of murals under various auspices. Another similar project was a wall painting on Colonial American themes done for the coffee shop of the Hotel Taft. Other murals were made for the Post Office at Freeport, Long Island (a WPA project), and the new Department of the Interior building (United States Treasury Art Project) in Detroit. Gropper also participated in a mural painters' show in New York in 1935.

The first exhibition of twenty-eight easel paintings took place at the Dinghy Gallery in the Village, February 3, 1936—much to the surprise of many who had come to admire his graphics.

The next year, two one-man shows of his work were held at the ACA Gallery, also a small Village gallery presided over by Herman Baron. Mr. Baron was among the first to sponsor the group of artists whose subject matter was of concern to the people and their desires for progressive action, art with social implications.

Gropper's work was extremely well received, by critics, patrons and fellow artists. The *New Yorker* published a 1937 article entitled "Satirist into Painter" which includes such phrases as "established beyond doubt that his talents in black and white are outshone by his gifts as a painter; as was also true of Daumier"—"Gropper takes his place henceforth as one of the most accomplished, as well as one of the most significant, artists of our generation." Lewis Mumford wrote of "a subtle palette—and marvelousness of movement and action."

Of the many reviewers who had comments to make on Gropper, the newly established artist, were Ernest Brace in the *Magazine of Art*, who wrote: "This artist is . . . unequivocally effective—his purpose seems as inseparable from his painting as the pigment."[3] *Survey Graphic* said: "His confident use of color, his vigorous painting is personal. The emotion he expresses is out of his own time and beliefs."[4] Another critic wrote of Gropper as "a man to reckon with, not only as a significant artist of the left wing school but as a painter with great creative potentialities. His recent exhibition dedicated to the Spanish Defenders showed growth."[5] In the September 1937 issue of *Esquire*, Harry Salpeter called him "one of America's most brilliant black-and-white artists, one of its most vivid and dramatic painters."[6] The *New York World-Telegram* said that Gropper's exhibit was "something that ought to be seen—by the cartoonist who has rapidly become one of the most able of the country's young painters."[7] The *New York Herald Tribune* spoke of "vigorous masculine brushmanship and exuberant originality."[8] Although many of the critics spoke of Gropper's liberal political views—referring to his well-known satirical and critical commentaries appearing in the left-wing press—all took pains to point out Gropper's aesthetic merits. For some these overrode politics; for others politics became acceptable when well presented.

11. Next War. Cartoon. R. Benchley Column. *New York American*. May 21, 1934

The year 1937 was a very important and active one in the life of Bill Gropper: his second and third exhibits took place, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and his paintings were purchased by both the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Modern Art.

The purchase of his work by the two major New York museums in one year was a great achievement for the newly established painter. In an interview published by the *New York Herald Tribune*, he reflected the views of many artists in his generation when he said, "I'm glad the Metropolitan is waking up, they've been pretty dead up there."[9] The museum had pur-

[3]Brace, Ernest. "William Gropper," *Magazine of Art*. Washington, D.C., Vol. 30, no. 8 (August, 1937), pp. 467-471.

[4]"William Gropper," *Survey Graphic*, July, 1937, pp.366-367.

[5]"William Gropper—Artist Commentator," *New Yorker*, March 27, 1937.

[6]Salpeter, Harry. "William Gropper: Proletarian," *Esquire*, September, 1937.

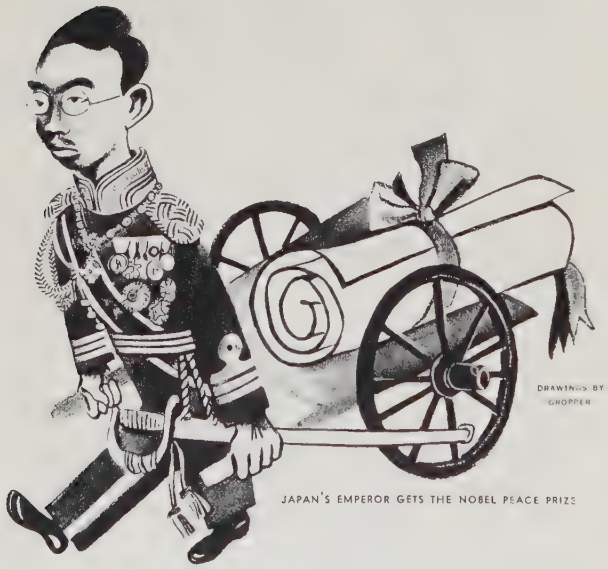
[7]"ACA Gallery Presents Gropper's Work," *New York World-Telegram*, March 13, 1937.

[8]"William Gropper," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 14, 1937.

[9]"Oil by Gropper . . .," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 27, 1937.

chased few works by living artists, and even fewer American artists. Such a policy was based on the generally accepted museum policy of making purchases only in safe areas, i.e., work already well-established as being artistically important. The artists, of course, always hoped for better support and recognition from the arbiters of the art world. The Metropolitan selection, which was entitled "The Hunt" (1937), was at first glance a normal hunting scene, with hounds, sportsmen, and a wooded countryside. The main difference from the subject of an English sporting print was the quarryman. The effect is somewhat surrealistic and frightening, built up by low and dark clouds and a somber pallette. The Museum of Modern Art's purchase of a work called "The Senate" (1936) was one which was to bring Gropper much more renown and recognition. The theme has, in later years, become associated very closely with the artist's name and has been the subject of many other canvases, drawings and prints over the years.

A similar painting acquired by the Encyclopedia Britannica Collection traveled the country for a number of years and was published in their book *Contemporary American Painting*. Another related canvas was exhibited in London in 1939. The topic of politicians has occupied Gropper repeatedly and has re-appeared as a constant theme.



13. Hirohito. Cartoon. *Vanity Fair*. August, 1935

The coveted Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship was the basis for another tour in the West. This time it was the dust bowl, Oklahoma and the Texas Panhandle—an area devastated by many years of drought. It was the center for much human misery, a subject familiar and close to the artist, but now set in a rural locale rather than the urban one in which he had grown up. Gropper made many sketches and paintings on this trip, one which seemed to heighten the earlier impressions gained on other transcontinental trips. Among easel paintings exhibited after the Guggenheim year were many of the agrarian and suffering West, but the major result was the Interior Department mural which concentrated on the building of the giant Boulder Dam.

Early in 1938, the artist exhibited the results of his Fellowship with the theme of the "dust bowl." Another exhibit that year was on the theme of the New Deal. At the same time the artist published a book of his cartoons and paintings. The New Deal theme show was not a one-man affair. The ACA Gallery exhibited together the work of such artists as Joe Jones, Phillip Evergood, Walter Quirt, Harry Sternberg, and George Biddle. All of the works shown had social implications which gave "voice to the people's protests and desires for progressive action. . . ."[10] Gropper's contribution was a painting entitled "The Market" (1938). The one-man show at the ACA Gallery for that year was opened March 7, 1938. Twenty-three oils were listed in the catalog. The next year, 1939, his by-now regular annuals opened February 19, consisting of nine oils, ten watercolors and four drawings. The most striking new theme was Americana.

In 1940, Bill Gropper was forty-three years old. It was twenty years since he had left his safe and well-paying job as staff artist for the *New York Tribune* to explore his interest for the underdog. He was a well-known and popular artist on the New York scene. Much of his enthusiasm and tremendous energy was now devoted to painting. He worked steadily and

[10]E.G. "First Big Show of Art . . .," *New York World-Telegram*, August 20, 1938.

painstakingly for his annual shows. At the Mecca Temple, on the occasion of his latest exhibition, his friends held a gathering to honor his twenty-year devotion to his art.

Among the painters who belong to his generation and came to American prominence at about the same time, Gropper was well received. He counted among his friends and acquaintances such men as: Blanche, Davis, Kuniyoshi, Marin, Marsh and Soyer, all of whom he admired. At ACA Gallery he exhibited and competed with other artists devoted to social commentary—such as Robert Gwathmey, Joseph Hirsch, Mervin Jules, Frank Kleinholz, Jacob Lawrence, Jack Levine, Gregorio Prestopine and Phillip Evergood.

Because of his long-time associations in the publishing field, he was also a friend of a number of writers: among them, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Carl Sandburg, Ben Hecht, Don Marquis, Heywood Broun, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe and Sherwood Anderson.

Time magazine felt the anniversary important enough to publish an article;[11] and a colleague, Joe Jones, wrote a Gropper Monograph. *Forum* also featured a Gropper article. The author, Ralph M. Pearson, wrote, "the most weighty reason for Gropper's importance is that he does not forget art when he is an avenger or prophet. His propaganda is always art; his art is sometimes propaganda." Discussing the similarity to Daumier, Pearson then continued, "Gropper is an original artist because he assimilates the influence and uses it in his own way, never in the specific concept or design, does he copy. . . ."[12]

To a great degree the 1941 exhibit and the social events which helped to celebrate it, marked the end of another phase of Gropper's work. He had become a major American painter, well known for his social commentary and highly respected for his painting ability. It was also the end of a period for America. The war had started in Europe, a war that had been threatening for some time, but now it loomed larger and more important in the consciousness of the American people. With it came many social changes and an end to the Depression and the New Deal. The artistic audience for a social

61. The Ice Man. Cartoon. *Young Israel.* c.1950

commentary decreased as the social ills of the Depression began to disappear and as America turned its attention to the miseries of people in other countries and to the production of war materiel.

For his 1941 exhibit at ACA, Gropper hung both paintings and lithographs on his well-known theme—the Senate. Most of the drawings had been made on assignment for a magazine. The 1942 show included a new area of concern —pictures reflecting the war, among them "Pearl Harbor" (1942) and "Bataan" (1942). This was also the year in which the pamphlet *Lidice* was rejected by the Office of War Information. They felt it portrayed Nazi atrocities too cruelly. It was finally published in Latin America.

The 1943 exhibit showed sketches and paintings of the European war. Gropper had gone over to see the destruction for himself.

The next year, there occurred one of those blundering incidents which so frequently mark pivotal events in the lives of people. The War

[11]"Twenty Years of Gropper," *Time*, February 19, 1940.

[12]Pearson, Ralph M. "The Artist's Point of View," *Forum* Magazine, November 7, 1940.

Department, through its art committee, had begun to send correspondents and artists with our troops to record for home consumption what was happening "over there." Among others assigned to the North African area were Anton Refregier, Phillip Evergood and William Gropper. The assignment was gladly accepted, but shortly before they were scheduled to depart these three were informed that they were "ineligible." Gropper and the other artists were hurt and terribly disappointed. Bill spoke for all of them when he said, "They made a big mistake—our country is the loser—we must carry on."

While the words are brave, the incident marked the beginning of a period of attacks on Gropper and a decline in public favor. The last exhibit at the ACA Gallery for some time was in 1943.

The nation was at war, and art was not considered of central importance, then, or in the cold war period which immediately followed. There were no more government-sponsored projects and few private purchasers for the work of artists with a social conscience. They were sadly out-of-place even in the art world, as the post-war generation of painters came to attention with action painting and various other abstract styles.

From 1948 to 1950, the Groppers again traveled in Europe. The trip began as a result of an invitation to attend the Wroclaw Congress of Intellectuals for Peace. The meeting place was the former German city of Breslau, still showing the bombed-out ruins of war. Luminaries from many countries were invited to discuss ways and means toward a brighter tomorrow. Unfortunately, the Communist propaganda machine was in full control. After lengthy application, the Groppers were permitted to visit Russia again, this time as guests of the Artists' Union. Exhibits and travels followed in Russia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria.

That William Gropper was among the first American artists or intellectuals to be on one of the late Senator McCarthy's blacklists is, by now, generally acknowledged as being on the credit side of the ledger. In 1953, however, America was in the throes of a witch hunt—no one seemed able to stand up to the all-powerful inquisitor; intimidation was a part of existence. Gropper was called to testify in connection with a map he had painted and which was distributed by the United States State Department Information Service. This map, "America, Its Folklore," shows many of the same folk heroes which Gropper had used in murals and easel pictures beginning in the mid-thirties. Apparently, the Senator or his staff felt that anyone who had published cartoons in so many liberal and left-wing publications should not be allowed to make pictures for the government. As a result of this hearing, Gropper was blacklisted and one of his booklets of drawings, *American Folklore*, was among those ordered removed from all State Department-controlled libraries around the world. All this had its effect in the art world, too. Long-time friends and acquaintances crossed the street in order to avoid meeting Bill Gropper. Commissions and purchases became fewer. For him, the only answer was to produce more work to express his resentments and observations in the way that he knew. The "Caprichos," a series of lithographs of fifty different designs, were produced between 1953 and 1956. They form a singular monument to a period of American demagoguery and brutality. Despite the vivid attacks and the even more painful temporary oblivion into which he had been placed, Gropper's work never lost its basic sympathy for people. In one of his frequent trips into lampoons of the all-powerful Senate, Gropper has painted a McCarthy-like figure. One is inclined to feel a bit of sorrow, a twinge of conscience, for the Senator whose flesh appears to disintegrate before our eyes.

During the twenty-some-odd years since the end of World War II, William Gropper has continued his work. Like the Japanese artist, Hokusai, he is "an old man crazy about drawing."[13] He has always carried with him a small sketch book and is constantly making notes for future work. These notebooks are a fascinating history of his ideas and interests, for he seldom draws what he sees in front of him, but rather what is on his mind.

[13]Michener, James A. *The Floating World*. New York: Random House, 1954.

His exhibits and participation in the art world have continued at his usual rapid rate and level of involvement. His painting exhibits began again after the war. The one of 1945 was held at Associated American Artists and was largely devoted once more to the theme of American legends. The Carnegie jury of 1946 awarded him a prize for his painting, "Don Quixote" (1942).

On his return from Europe in 1951, AAA Gallery exhibited his work. According to a review in *Art News*, "the artist has gained in richness of palette and increased power of design. His skill in setting down an unusual and instantaneous vision into artistic expression is apparent. It is paradoxical, perhaps, that while some of his paintings are actually disturbing, they are all carefully ordered. It is owing to this disciplined power that his work attains such distinction."[14]

In the late fifties and in the sixties, Gropper again had numerous exhibits and commissions. In 1957, Mexico City had a showing of one hundred Gropper lithographs.The reviewers compared him favorably to Posada and Orozco and praised his great freedom of line and concept. The 1964 exhibit in Rome was also well received. European and Latin American tastes had not been affected by McCarthyism. Rome admired his ferocious wit and beautiful colors. American exhibits were also held at the Garelick Gallery in Detroit, 1956, and beginning in 1962 at the Galerie de Tours in San Francisco, and in Los Angeles at the Heritage Gallery.

Other honors have continued to demonstrate the prominent position that Gropper's work has earned for him in the world of art. In 1965, he was awarded a Ford Foundation Grant and became Artist-in-Residence at the Evansville Museum. The Herzl Institute in Israel showed his work during 1966, and the famed Tamarind Lithography Workshop invited him to produce several graphics during 1967.

There can be little doubt, when one looks at the work of Bill Gropper, that he has achieved an important place in the annals of American Art. Much critical comment and recognition have been aimed at the subject matter of his cartoons and paintings, and justifiably so. This is where he first became known, but there has always been more to his art than this.

The influence of the masters on Gropper is recorded in many comments, as well as in his pictures, but for an occasional mirror reaction, little remains of a permanent nature. Oriental, Romantic or Cubist—all have been digested and have disappeared. The essence of his style remains a unique one. He pays homage to few; he paints what interests him, in a way in which he feels comfortable.

Over the course of almost fifty years, he has concentrated on people—people picketing or working in sweatshops or picking crops, fat and skinny ones, the mighty in the fullness of their power, and the oppressed. In recent years, he has frequently turned to themes of Jewish village life in Eastern Europe. Throughout, however, his work has been much more than the mere rendering of subject matter. He has continuously shown a perfection of painterly composition, which has put his work into the realm of art.

Many painters perfect the techniques of composition with one or two human figures but their compositions fall apart when the requirements are more complex. Gropper manages to avoid dullness in both, simply because his early experience as a cartoonist has taught him the vitality of a dynamic composition, established with a minimum of elements. When he exercises his sword-like wit, as in the painting of FDR, "L'Etat, C'Est Moi" (1941), the baroque feeling of the costume is extended into the background but attention remains centered on the all-too-easily recognized face. When he pleads for love and tolerance, as in "De Profundis" (1943), the prayer shawl is arranged so as to hold the eye and guide it in gentle moves—dark strips are repeated there and in the wrappings on the arm. The crone in "Time" (1944) wanders in a painterly fog. She has practically withered away while in the miasma behind her looms a clock which continues to tick away her time. "Wine Drinker" (1964) is composed with subtle charm; we are led to feel slightly cross-

[14]M.B. "Fifty-Seventh Street in Review," *Art Digest*, April 1, 1951.

eyed, too, as is the imbiber. Gropper's approach is different for the mighty figure of an important personage (J. P. Morgan?)—he almost entirely fills his allotted picture space and our eyes are led through the composition by means of the collar on a vest or the lapel. In such simple figure compositions, Gropper has kept backgrounds spaceless or has made the merest suggestion by means of a stage prop, such as the outline of a column or tree, or the break-up of space in a vaguely Cubist manner.

When he turns to small groups, he is more inclined still to use Cubist forms. Gropper is not so often a landscape painter; frequently when he is, he uses strong diagonals and color intensities in dissonances. These stem from his early work for daily publications, where a "quick reading" is essential to catch the reader's eye. The transition from such lithographs as "Hysteria" (1941) and "War" (1941) to oils on the nature of "Pearl Harbor" (1942) or "Prisoners" (1937) is an easy one. The basic movements are the same. There is, also, similar straight-forward treatment of composition and color.

Throughout his work, Bill Gropper has followed the dictum of his teacher, Henri: . . . to be himself and let his work speak for him. Because of his concerns, his art has sometimes been called mere propaganda, but such nomenclature refers only to the subject of a picture and misses altogether the aesthetics of Gropper's work. His pictures are much more than mere slogans or dramatic poses in support of some political cause. Propaganda art is with us a great deal in the 20th century; its baroque faces and histrionic gesturing are only too common in the files of recent history. After their use, these visual exercises are art only in the sense of a record of what was done—to be consulted by a historian, who might want to see the kind of drawing produced in Russia under Stalin or in Germany under Hitler.

The true work of art, whether in support of a cause or not, lives and merits attention not because of its subject but in spite of it. A good parallel is the work of the German artist, Kaethe Kollwitz, whose lithographs and drawings of the 20's were filled with the pathetic faces of the starving poor. Forty years after her greatest graphics were produced, her work is more in demand than ever; today's public reacts fervently to her pictures of sorrowing motherhood and starving children. Kollwitz's art reached a supreme height—her universal appeal goes beyond her plea for a particular society's improvement. Gropper's art, like Kollwitz's, goes far past the propaganda aspects inherent in social commentary art. The *New York World-Telegram* put it this way: "In Gropper's work there is none of the external conflict of subject with aesthetics."[15]

The art of social concern is merely one part, though a major one, of a complex of works. It is a base from which he moves out, which infinitely enriches his artistic efforts. Gropper is a superb draughtsman who has surety of line achieved by few. He ranges from people through landscapes with equal ease because he has been an observer of the life around him; in all, he wields a precise and telling brush.

Gropper has always shown that he is a human being as well as an artist. This is not to deny his artistry but simply his re-affirmation that artists are people who live in a certain time and place, eat, pay taxes and have similar concerns to others. Gropper particularly reflects the problems and concerns of the people in his experience. Some critics have felt that artists should only be concerned with abstract notions of beauty or design, and have derided those who are also concerned with the human condition. Gropper's work has always reflected his involvement.

His art has always been about something, something of importance and meaning. In his earliest days, he was involved with the slums, the oppression of the poor worker. This was before child-labor laws, before minimum wages. Such ideas, and others we now accept as a normal part of our social fabric, were then ultra radical socialistic nonsense to many. To other professions was left the task of bringing changes about through the normal channel of politics and legislation. Gropper, the artist, was concerned with awakening popular interest in the wrongs of society by pointing them out in his art.

[15]"ACA Gallery Presents Gropper's Work," *New York World-Telegram*, March 13, 1937.

He is a master at such pointing out. Among his major concerns over the years have been: the conditions under which Americans worked and the conditions under which Americans were governed; the injustice of the Spanish Civil War; the lot of the poor peasant and farmer; the image of war, tortures and oppression.

Indeed, Gropper's art has shown his sympathy for all misery. Perhaps because he is a gentle person, perhaps because he has seen so much of the world's suffering, he has never been able to develop cruelty toward his subjects. His work often displays sarcasm—sarcasm which is intended to slay with laughter, but always he develops a kind of gentle pity, even for the worst of his villains. If Bill Gropper has won a distinctive place for himself in the long history of art, it is because he has been so able a champion for both man's deepest social conscience and highest visual sympathies.

All of these topics were or should have been of concern to the people of the world in their time. Some of the older subjects may now seem relatively unimportant ones—only their artistic merit remains. Gropper's graphics and paintings will stand or fall, as do those of his artistic predecessors on the basis of their merit.

In the post-war period, Gropper has frequently turned to Jewish themes, particularly in his graphics. As he has often said, it is not because he is a devoutly religious man, but because Hitler and the persecutions of the 20th century have aroused in him a desire to learn more about his people—to sing of their history and achievements.

The social issues of the day, when expressed in a picture, are always under the threat of being dismissed as mere political slogans, of arousing in the viewer emotions which have nothing to do with art and which, in fact, keep him from seeing the art values. Gropper's art has often involved political ideas which have produced, on occasion, enormous storms of adverse comment. He has happily, however, seen many of his ideas, formerly considered radical, become a part of the accepted social fabric. "I don't think I've changed or even modified my view," Gropper said recently. "Time has caught up with me"[16] (*San Francisco Examiner*, Aug. 15, 1965). In the thirties, Diego Rivera, with others of the influential Mexican Mural School, felt that art should reflect the new order of things as they hoped to see them; and that these reflections should be seen in their murals on public buildings. This was not Gropper's view. While he was sympathetic to many liberal causes, he always felt the basic importance of fitting the work to where it was going to be seen.

His work has thrived on opposition. He has needed to be faced with a target, the goal of hitting the dragon or devil—at which to throw darts. His images of verbose and pompous politicians have been permanently etched on several generations of Americans; his cartoon of Emperor Hirohito caused an international rumpus; his drawings for the booklets memorializing the dead at Lidice and in the Warsaw ghetto have become classics; his occasional views of art connoisseurs and exhibit openings have not helped his cause in some circles of the art world, having demolished many false fronts.

Gropper's work is not cynical; it shows too much concern for the downtrodden. Within it is a hint of tragedy, a striving for peace, not violence, for improvement in the world by gentle therapy, not radical surgery.

How does one establish the work of an artist as great? Where does one begin to evaluate the validity of a painting? There are no standards similar to the absolute measures of weight or size, which are kept in a government vault. There are, to be sure, standards of evaluation in art, but they are such as to frustrate the precisionist mind of our time which seeks to establish neat, inviolable categories.

There is, for a potential artist, a basic requirement of learning to control his medium, how to make the paint flow where it is wanted. He must know how to render with his fingers that which his mind commands. Such proficiency is relatively easy to recognize (though not absolute either). It can be achieved with relative ease through a period of intense effort by almost any

[16]Hobbs, Lisa. "Gropper's Art—A Human Cry," *San Francisco Examiner*, August 15, 1965.

normal human being. The amateur has never achieved this. Next, however, must come the great imponderable of content or message. If the artist has nothing to say or is not sensitive to some sort of reaction in the real or imagined universe, sheer technical ability will not help him. Here we lose most of the pot-boilers, the hacks who turn out beautiful but empty likenesses, who vaguely duplicate the appearance of a great Cubist composition or the appearance of bowl of fruit without transmitting to the viewer any of the impact of a great master.

And, there is also the unknown reaction of the viewers. Gropper's work gets it repeatedly as does Picasso's, Michelangelo's or any other master. The total work is technically proficient, has a meaningful or important content and composition, and then goes beyond that to burn itself into the mind's eye, to become a universal and unforgettable *gestalt*.

It is this universal *gestalt* which leads us to an understanding of this man's work.

In color, composition, plasticity and line, Gropper has been singularly willing to utilize the lessons of the past. A master of line and distortion in his own right, he has yet studied thoroughly and thoughtfully the lessons of Cubism and Expressionism to gain added strength from their discoveries.

As a painter, he is distinguished by a subtle palette and by his marvelous sense of movement and action. His color is as completely individualized as was Kuniyoshi's; he draws forth a world of dull greens metamorphosing into yellows or turquoise, and violet dark grays that serve for contrast. Often these somber and striking hues are held in check by a dramatic use of white pigment. In his power of condensation, he has few rivals; he concentrates with admirable economy, into line and mass, a subject that another painter might require a whole acre of canvas to capture. Gropper's many years of experience in caricature have probably been an aid to him in this respect; through it, he has learned to suppress all the extraneous facts and observations, and to give forth with conclusive strokes, as if he jumped immediately to them.

Gropper has a dynamic feeling for forms and their spatial relationships. Yet movement is not merely the subject of Gropper's paintings; it exists in his handling of the masses of a quiet landscape or in a somber scene of destruction. His artist's eye supplants the literal fact so that even when it comes closest to the raw details of social catastrophe, the resultant visual experience is still, above all, one of formal aesthetic relationships. In a recent discussion of his latest work, Gropper noted, "I react to life and it's a stimulant to me. It could be a phrase; it could be an attitude; it could be a mood. It's broad. I'm open for any little thing, but I am of a period. I come from a sort of humanistic element. I love people, and when I draw or paint, it comes out people, and the landscape is what these people make it."[17]

Although his people-oriented art has undergone many variations, it never has ended up as a complete abstraction. The dominant art of the nineteen fifties and sixties has had little direct effect on Gropper's personal approach. He has held his own against a tide of tachiste and abstract work and yet maintained the brilliance of his side of the stylistic spectrum. He is, in fact, an eminent designer, quite familiar with recent formal aesthetics. His canvases are not, however, receptacles for scientific research, nor are they diaries of painterly brush strokes. Yet they intuitively embody the results of such experiences.

Gropper has always escaped the danger of being unartistic. To what extent he is an artist rather than an experimenter or even a mere reporter is proven by his war portrayals. They are not satirical jibes against war, but catastrophic events that have been turned into new visions by means of the artist's creative process. His marvelous series of politicians are distillations of the greatest simplicity, powerful linear compositions often aided by deliberate color juxtapositions. This is not merely art with a purpose, but it is symbolic art—an art born of an experience, but valid beyond this experience in time.

Gropper's painting is unequivocally effective . . . the briefest glance tells the story, and yet, as

[17]Personal interview (taped), Dr. August Freundlich, Director, Lowe Gallery, University of Miami, and William Gropper, Miami, Florida. Spring, 1967.

with all significant stories, there is much more than plot. It is impossible to turn away without going deeper into the picture, without savoring the details upon which the effect is built, and without exploring the implications of gesture, setting, color, movement and form. These are closely knit into the picture as a whole like the separate lines of a dramatic climax . . . and age has not neutralized the acid of this climax, for essentially his paintings are scenes of human foolishness and tragedy, and these are constants which carry no date. Even at their most naive, the paintings have a rare compassion —small boys look out upon the world with eyes filled with wonder, an old woman stands in front of a clock that forever ticks away her life. As the creator of such works as these, Gropper perfectly fits his definition of the creative artist: "The . . . artist cannot allow his mind to be harnessed to conformity, neither can we harness Pegasus . . . he must be free to sing, fly, defy, challenge. . . ."[18]

[18]Miller, Bertha M. *Illustrators of Children's Books—1946-1956*. Boston: Horn Book, 1958.

William Gropper: His Statements

The following comments by William Gropper are from a taped interview. They present a direct sampling of the artist's ideas and attitudes. In the hope that the flavor of Gropper's original comments might be saved, little attempt has been made to change speech patterns into more standard written form. The responsibility for grouping into related areas is the undersigned's.

A. L. F.

HOW I WORK

The synopsis of my fifty or sixty years is variation. I have done a lot of non-objective abstractions under my paintings. I put a base on first, then I work up and down and around, but I don't end up with an abstraction. I can't stick to one way of doing work. I get bored with it, so I change, but I don't follow schools.

I'm not against abstract art. I think we are living in a wild time and everything has its place and purpose. I thing that the emphasis, the fetish or worshipping of one art over another is stupid, it's silly. It's limiting one's vision. I come back to Bellows and my old teachers: "there are many points of view."

At an early age, I went in for Denman Ross's theory and color. I studied Ambridge's dynamic symmetry. I went in for an awful lot of things, when I was young, but the tough part is forgetting it. We take in an awful lot of garbage. It's easy to take in and hard to shake. It's like the smoking habit.

Schools don't influence me, as much as life. I do people with faces, with noses and eyes, in all the forms that I can understand. There have been a number of years when I've seen all of this disappear and the faces became circles and the circles became lines and forms disappeared. Disappeared to a point of black on black and so on. It's been a lonely period, but living in the country and being very much aware of people, I think that I will not be deformed that much. I carry on.

I react to life and it's a stimulant to me. It could be a phase, it could be an attitude, it could be a mood. It's broad. I'm open for any little thing, but I am of a period. I come from a sort of humanistic element. I love people and when I draw or paint, it comes out people and the landscape is what these people make it.

I look at a wall and if I see a touch or a semblance of life, it could be a line, a human element and I communicate somehow. I feel good, but when I see lines that are not lines, forms that are not forms, then there is no root, no foundation. If a picture can last on a wall and I get a certain response, a certain feeling, then I keep it there. But, if it does not move me or I feel it is a little bit off, then off it goes and I destroy it or work on it. As writers have characteristics, so have I, a color, a brush stroke. It's really a world in itself.

I work very fast, because spontaneity is something I have been trained to do in newspaper work. As a cartoonist, I had to knock them out, get them in by the deadline. I like working that way—it's sort of a challenge. I think life is challenging—art is challenging.

I have done a great deal of graphics, although at the same time I feel the luxury of color is another world. I don't know what I am primarily; I am a graphic, when I am doing graphics. I am a painter, when I am painting and I am a sculptor, when I am sculpting. I think that would be the most honest answer.

There are times, when I'm painting or drawing, that I feel we are conditioned by our society and that our painting is our reaction or behavior to society.

WHAT I BELIEVE

"The visual artist" is fortunate to have been trained to be perceptive to our environment, to things happening. Like the non-objective astract art. This had to come because of our conditions,

atomic energy and national security. And I am fascinated by the youth. I challenge them when I meet them, because they are living in a marvelous period. They have created a new criteria, a new measurement, a new way of thinking. We are living in an age now, where rules are out of date, inches are out of date and weight is out of date. Now, it's light years, it's weightlessness. It's not one and one make two, but a question of what is one? New values that they have to find and I think they will. And what art has done—it has eliminated countries and borders, the restrictions of nations. Cultures will be assimilated, but the human element, I don't believe, will be lost. No matter how we try to put the human element into computers, it's still making mistakes. It's still doing good things too.

That's my heritage. I'm from the old school, defending the under-dog. Maybe because I've been an under-dog or still am. I put myself in their position. I feel for the people. It may also be attributable, in part, to my cartoon experience. The vitality of an idea or thought is the vitality of a situation and you are for or against a villain and a hero. It's the old plot that you keep hearing and seeing.

I cannot endorse a Utopia, which I'm afraid I will not live to see. I've gone through the illusions of Utopia, but I would like to suggest it by showing the other side. I don't think flowers are the answer for me. It is probably, for a great many people. I have to face things in the most brutal way that I can and let it out and then I feel better. Maybe it's my heredity or maybe it's my way of life. I can't close my eyes and say it is the best of all possible worlds and let it go at that. I become involved. For example, if the Mexicans in Los Angeles were mistreated, I would feel Mexican. I react, just as Negroes react, because I have felt the same things as a Jew, or my family has.

I have been, at times, very interested in extremes. The extreme left as well as extreme right. I went into it one hundred per cent. I never joined any organization or party, but I drew for them openly. I didn't change my name, as a lot of other people did. So, I was more or less classed as an extremist, but I have also drawn for very erudite publications and very snazzy publications like *Vanity Fair*.

There is one thing I want to do, I want to be honest with myself. I am only here as a visitor, like everybody else. I will be facing myself, whether in the mirror, psychologically, or in my work. It's sort-of-a basis, an outline for my behavior. I shouldn't be ashamed of anything I did—I should be honest.

THE ART WORLD

Most artists, or I should say sincere artists, create their own little world. Even if they have the model in front of them, it becomes their world. The beauty of all this art that we have is; it's challenging and you cannot disprove it. All of these are little worlds and it is part of our world.

In the thirties, when more people began to take up art in their leisure, I thought it would be a better world and easier for everyone to enjoy art more. The idea of art for the masses and I was all for it. Now I am very much against it. I'm getting the idea of what it really is. I think that the expressing of emotions, the idea of therapy, of senior citizens who are bored and the neurotic people who are going in for painting is lousing up my world. There is no feeling, no respect, no integrity for the profession. You go into any home and look on the walls and I can tell you what the person is like, by the pictures they have selected or have had selected for them, or by their books and their records. It's confusing, especially with people you like and know. They can really expose themselves, undress, when they put their pictures on the wall.

I think this art explosion is not a good thing. I find that in it, the good things are lost to a great extent and the exposure of wrong things uppermost, and people are led to a museum and they respect a museum, then the artist takes a toilet and puts it on canvas, or puts it up as sculpture and they are told it is art.

This is what has happened to a great extent. *Garbage Expression!* and it inspires the weaker, the non-developed and they throw it into the

face, well, my face, let's say. I am offended, but I will not carry a picket sign and protest. I think they deserve what they get.

The younger generation hasn't discovered me yet. There is a thing I get a tremendous kick out of. I'm fascinated by things, techniques, surface painting. I get a charge out of them, but it's not my mission, it's theirs. I'll enjoy it with them. I love touching various materials and textures, but I don't have to take LSD. I'm on a trip ever since I was born.

A long time ago, I was assigned by *Vanity Fair* to cover the Senate. I stayed two or three weeks and painted the Senate as I saw it. I think the United States Senate is the best show in the world. If people saw it, they would know what their government is doing. The painting that I did was rejected by every show I tried to get it into. Then it was brought back and the Museum of Modern Art had it and now it is in every show. I get bored, so I did one or two Senates, and now I will do a Senate only when a Senator makes a speech that makes me mad.

In 1947, I was invited, with brother artists from all over the world, not many, to the unveiling of the Warsaw Ghetto monument. I'm not Jewish in a professional sense but in a human sense; here are six million destroyed. There is a ritual in the Jewish religion of lighting a candle for the dead, but instead of doing this, I decided to paint a picture in memory, every year. In this way, I paid my tribute, rather than burning a candle.

I have been drawn into many causes and lives of my friends, when they have been sought by authorities because they were idealists. They were against a system that was doing wrong to them or to their people. I really react; I have reacted that way all my life—I just can't repeat myself.

I don't think I will ever retire; I'm just, well, I just show promise. I'm the guy who is always discovered. I lean toward those who are struggling for something better. I want to paint the truths that I feel, and, at times, I have been criticized for that.

Chronology

1897 Born in New York City, December 3

1911 Works in sweatshops

1911 Scrawls pictures on sidewalks

1912-15 Studies with Bellows and Henri

1913 Famous Armory Show

1919 Joins Sunday Section of *New York Tribune*

1920 Contributes to *The Quill*, *The Pagan*, *Playboy*

1921 First show of monotypes, in Greenwich Village

1921 Contributes cartoons to *Revolutionary Age*

1922 Draws for *Smart Set*, *Bookman*, *Dial*. Begins to paint

1922 Goes to Cuba

1923 Draws for *Pearson's* Magazine (Frank Harris, editor)

1924 Marries Sophie Frankel

1925 Draws for *Broom*, published in Italy

1925 Joins *New York World*

1925 Joins *Morning Freiheit*

1925 Paints "Fresh Fish" sign in Missouri on trip West

1926 Contributes to *New York Post*

1927 Visits Russia with Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis

1929 Book of fifty-six drawings of U.S.S.R., published in France

1930 Gropper cartoons published by ACA Gallery

1930 Moves to Croton-On-Hudson. Delegate to Kharkov Conference, U.S.S.R.

1930 *Alley Oop* published by Coward-McCann

1934 Schenley murals (two), "Wine Festival," exhibited three years later

1934 Contributes to *Vanity Fair*

1934 *New York American* feature page

1935 Hirohito cartoon in *Vanity Fair*; also *New Republic*, *The Nation*, *New Masses*

1936 First show ACA Gallery, New York City, February 3 (he is 39 years old)

1936 Bought litho press. Printed limited editions

1936 First Artist's Congress, New York City

1936 Freeport, Long Island, Post Office mural

1937 Second show ACA Gallery, New York City, dedicated to "Defenders of Spanish Democracy"

1937 Awarded Guggenheim Fellowship

1937 Goodyear Rubber Company purchases his painting "The Senate"

1937 Metropolitan Museum of Art purchases his paintings "The Hunt" and "Refugees"

1938 Exhibit of Guggenheim Project (dust bowl theme)

1938 Murals for new Interior Building, Washington, D.C.

1938 New Deal show at ACA Gallery, New York City

1938 March exhibition at ACA Gallery

1939 February exhibition at ACA Gallery

1939 Paints picture titled "Senate Debate," exhibited in London in 1945

1939 Murals for N.W. Postal Station, Detroit

1940 ACA show

1940 Phillips Memorial obtains painting, "Minorities"

1940 Show at Contemporary Book Shop in Pittsburgh

1940 Twenty years since Gropper left *New York Tribune*—20th anniversary celebration at Mecca Temple (Gropper is 43 years old)

1941 Gropper's sixth one-man show since 1936

1942 April ACA show

1944 Gropper not sent to war zone by United States State Department

1946 Carnegie Annual, third prize for "Don Quixote No. 1"

1947 Commission paintings for State of Pennsylvania

1948 Goes to Europe for movement dedicated to Warsaw ghetto. Decides to paint in memory of victims every year

1948-50 One-man shows in Paris, Poland, U.S.S.R.,Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria

1951 Show at AAA Gallery

1953 Gropper 56 years old. McCarthy hearing

1954 More than 14 shows in New York City since 1936

1954, 1956, 1958 One-man shows ACA Gallery. Wrote and illustrated *The Little Tailor* (published by Dodd, Mead & Co., New York City)

1956 Shows in Detroit—Garelick Gallery—Show in London at Piccadilly Gallery

1956 Has drawn 50 "Caprichos" lithographs since 1950

1957 Shows in Mexico City

1959 One-man show at the Silvan Simone Gallery, Los Angeles. Also in 1960

1961 One-man show, ACA Gallery

1962 One-man show, ACA Gallery

1962 One-man show, Galerie de Tours, San Francisco

1964 Shows in Rome, in March. Goes on tour in Italy: Milan, Turin, Bari, etc.

1964 Exhibits painting "Senate Debate" in United States for first time

1964 Galerie de Tours show, San Francisco

1965 Etching show, AAA, New York City (March)

1965 University of Maine show, October

1965 Ford Foundation and American Federation of Art Grant, Artists-in-Residence program. One-man show, Museum of Evansville, Indiana

1965 Show at Galerie de Tours, San Francisco

1966 Exhibits at Herzl Institute, Israel

1967 Lithographs show, Tamarind Lithography Workshop (January-February). In March, one-man show at Heritage Gallery, Los Angeles

1967 One-man show, Don Conacher Gallery (August)

1967 Stained glass windows for Temple Har Zion, River Forest, Illinois

1967 Exhibit, Rosary College, River Forest, Illinois (November)

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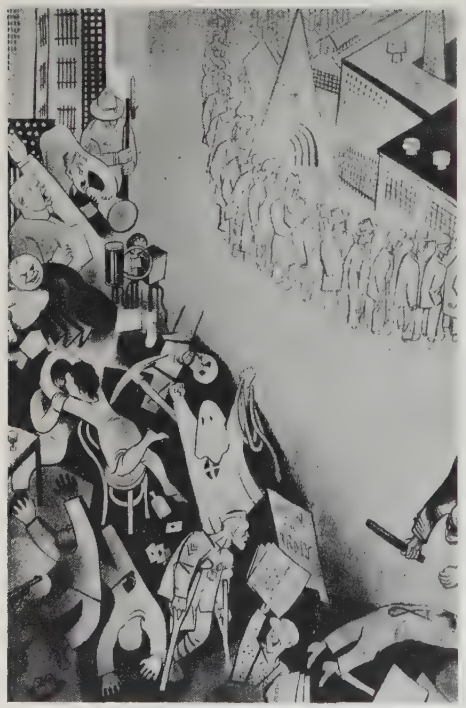
9. The Idler. Private Collection. c.1931



10. Sketches for Mural. Collection of the Artist. 1930

12. Schenley Mural (detail). Bacardi Bar and Import Lounge— Schenley Products Co. 1934

14. Mural for Post Office, Freeport, New York. Courtesy of Treasury Department Art Projects. 1936

15. Combat. Private Collection. c.1937

16. Spanish Prisoners. Collection of the Artist. c.1937

17. Kuniyoshi Portrait. Private Collection. 1937

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21. Interior Department Mural. Courtesy of Treasury Department Art Projects. c.1938

22. Pretzel Vendor. Courtesy of Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. 1939

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28. Meeting. Private Collection. c.1940

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30. Museum Opening. Collection of the Artist. c.1940

31. Sentencing. Collection of the Artist. c.1940

32. L'Etat C'est Moi. Mr. and Mrs. Gene Gropper Collection. c.1941

33. The Artist's Apprentice. Mr. and Mrs. Gene Gropper Collection. c.1941

34. Sketch for Detroit Mural. Collection of the Artist. c.1941

35. Hysteria. Lithograph. c.1941

36. War. Lithograph. c.1941

37. Cotton Pickers. Courtesy of Heritage Gallery. 1942

B. Monotype. Collection of the Artist. 1922

38. The Invaders. Collection of the Artist. 1942

39. Air Raid. Collection of the Artist. 1942

c. Strike. Collection of the Artist. 1936

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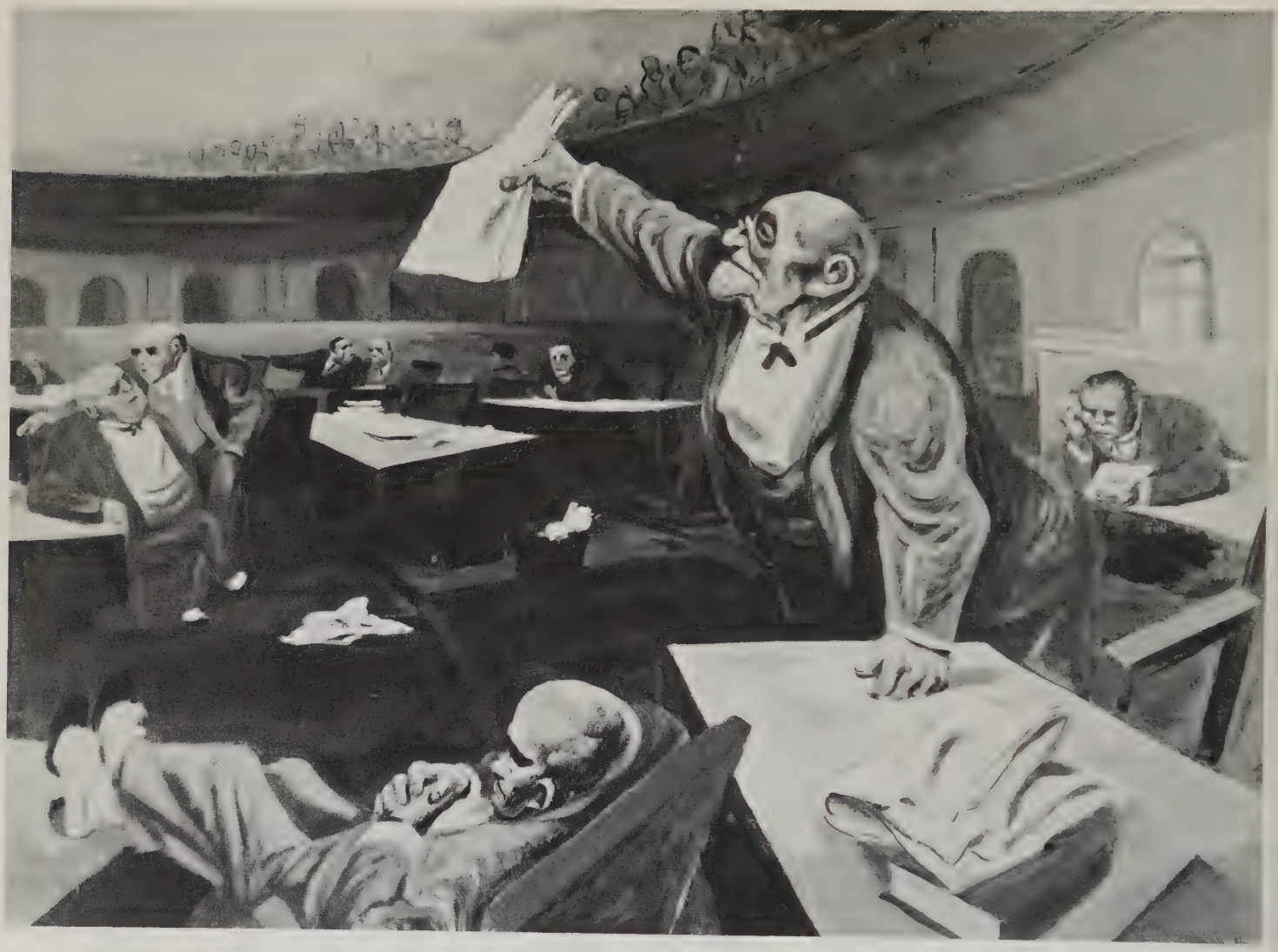

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42. Storm Troopers. *Lidice*. c.1942

43. Farm Hand. Courtesy of Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. c.1942

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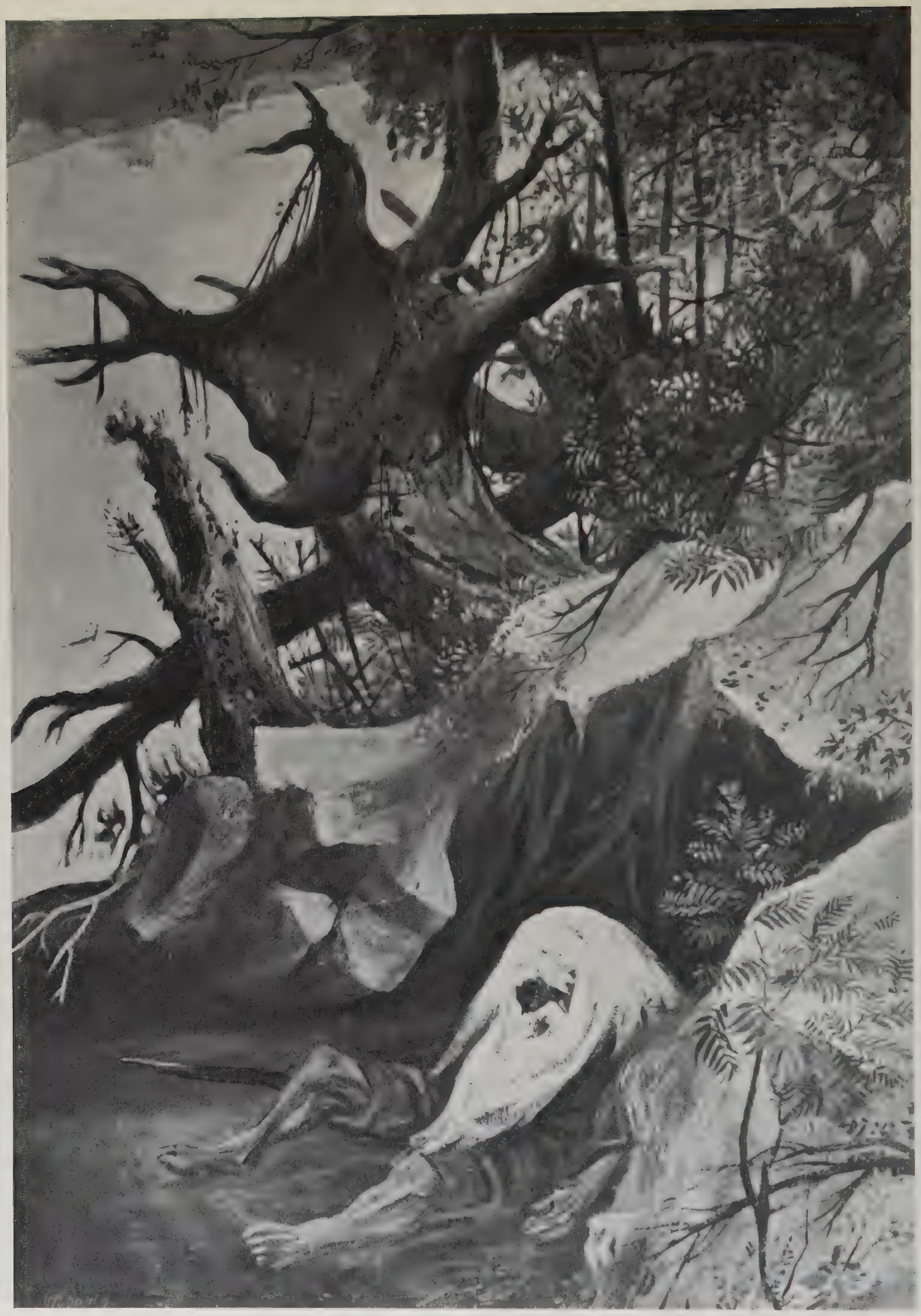

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52. Headless Horseman. Private Collection. c.1945

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F. Stained Glass Windows. Temple Har Zion; River Forest, Illinois. 1967

60. Polish Wedding. Collection of the Artist. 1948

62. Emancipator. Lithograph. c.1950

63. The Village. Lithograph. c.1950

64. Untouchables. Jerry Spiegel Collection. c.1950

65. Sweatshop. Lawrence Arine Collection. c.1950

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71. Tycoon. Private Collection. 1954

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77. Farm Worker. Courtesy of ACA Gallery. c.1960

78. Self Portrait. Jack Kartee Collection. c.1960

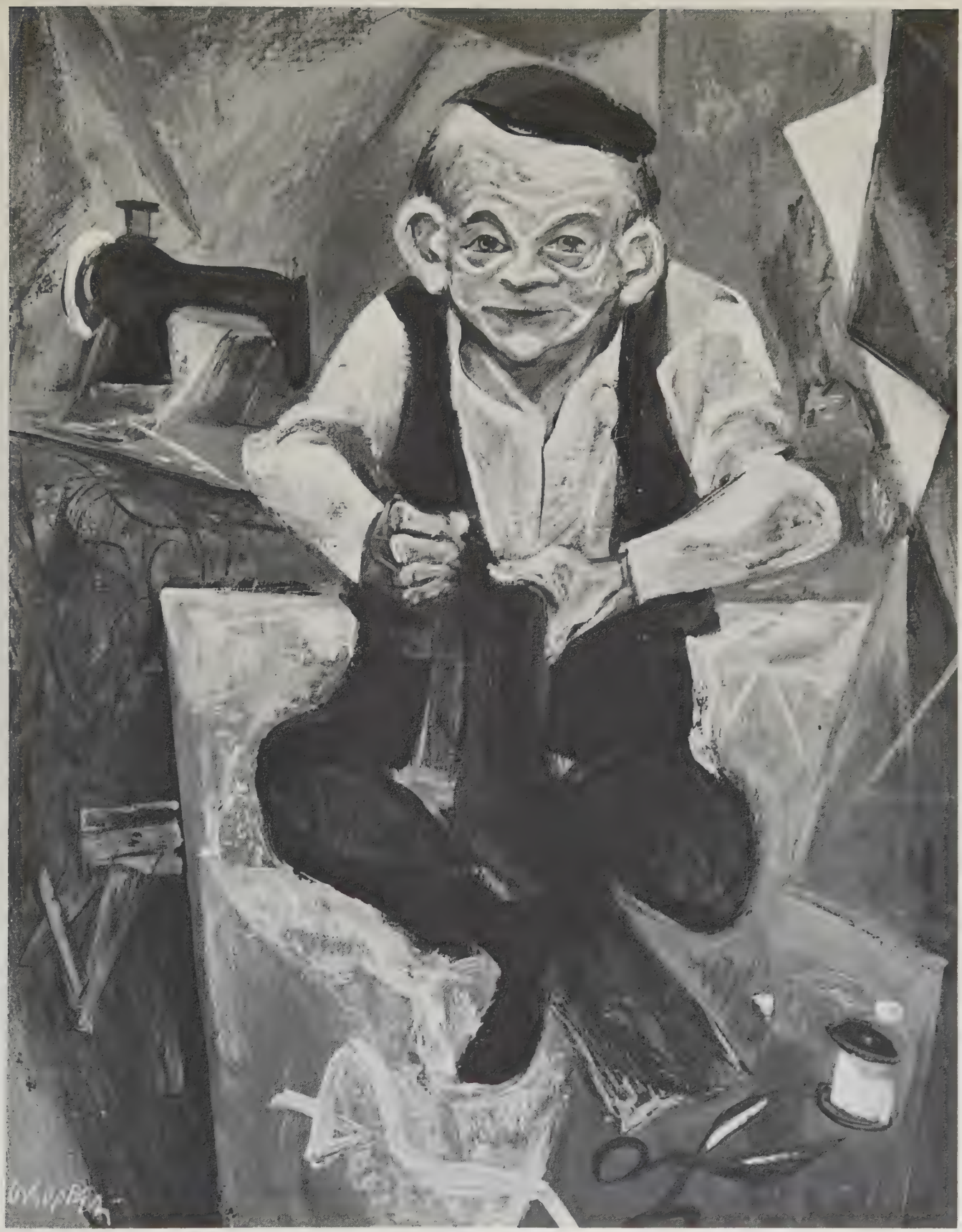
80. Musicians. Mr. and Mrs. Robert Collection. c.1960

81. Chess Players. Mr. and Mrs. Karl Hirsch Collection. c.1960

82. Night Spot. Private Collection. c.1960

83. Young Girl on Chair. Drawing. Private Collection. c.1960

84. Memoir. Marcus Gilden Collection. c.1960



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H. The Senate. Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art. 1935

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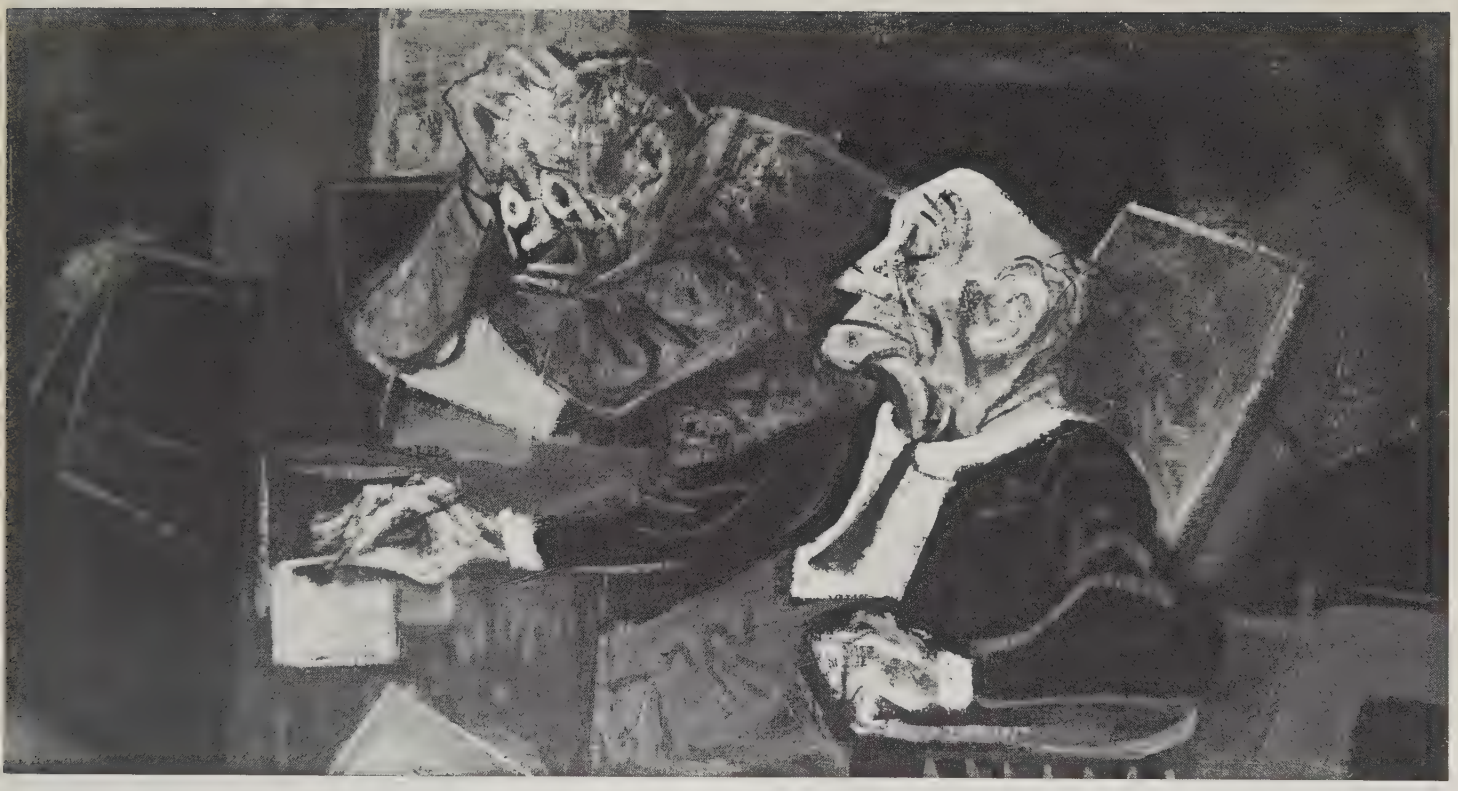

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